

Chapter IV

DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL STUDENT TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The training of students for career management and their preparation for inclusion in the world of work is one of the key competences of modern society. Providing support to students in taking responsibility and an active role in their future career development should represent a significant segment of initial [college/undergraduate] education of preschool teachers. The aim of this research was to determine student's opinion on ways of improving career competencies during initial education through the following tasks: 1) what skills in the field of career management students want to develop within the initial education 2) through which forms / types of activities it is possible to provide support to students in this field. Students of the final year of elementary studies (N = 45) and specialist and master studies (N = 55) were surveyed. Material, technical and human resources in the school were analysed. The results of the research indicate that first of all students want to further develop the skills to conduct interviews with employers, research and self-assessment of skills, knowledge, and personality traits and skills and communication in a foreign language. In accordance with available human and material resources in the school and suggestions made by students regarding possible ways of improving career skills, the realization of a research and development project that focuses on instruction/student training in the field of skills is deemed necessary. The sustainability of the project would involve the expansion of activities: online realization, as well as the establishment of a Centre for Management and Career Development.

Keywords: *initial education of preschool teachers, career management skills, competencies, trainings courses and instructions, project.*

Introduction

The contemporary development of society is characterized by scientific and technological information expansion, with constant modification of jobs and occupations. Instead of the competencies for performing specialized tasks, competences are increasingly needed which enable the vertical and horizontal mobility of individuals in the labour market, their adaptability to changes in technologies, and new forms of organization of work (Korać, 2011). It is expected that an individual will enhance existing competencies and gain new ones for competitiveness in the labour market, as well as having highly developed skills in managing their career, which indicates that career guidance and counselling is an extremely current and significant area, both from the perspective of the individual and of society as a whole. It is present in all relevant policies focusing on education and employment and it is a strong link between the world of work and the world of education (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2018).

In the *Career Guidance and Counselling Strategy in the Republic of Serbia* (2010), career guidance is a term that includes all aspects and actors of the education system. It is defined as a series of activities that enable individuals, at any age, at any time in their lives, to identify their own competencies and interests, to make decisions regarding their education, training and profession, and to manage the flows of their lives in the field of learning, labour and other areas in which they can acquire and apply competencies. The goal of career guidance is to develop competencies for decision-making on education, profession, and career management (OECD, 2004) to give them support in choosing options within available career opportunities, in order to optimally develop and use their own potentials and achieve satisfaction in professional and private life (Djurovic, 2018). Career development always takes place within a context that is bound to a person and his/her environment (Marković & Nikolić, 2015). In career choice, this context includes the inner reality of the decision maker and the external reality of the world of work.

In accordance with the above, higher education institutions are facing new challenges and responsibilities. Providing support for students in taking responsibility and an active role in their future career development should represent a significant segment of initial [college/undergraduate] education. Students need to develop their competencies in relation to the conditions and requirements of the profession, and to manage as successfully as possible their own professional development and career, independently. In the *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia until 2020* (Službeni glasnik RS No. 16/2010) and the *Career Guidance and Counselling Program for young people aged 19–30 years* (2014), standards are defined in these areas: personal development of the individual, research of possibilities for learning and employment, planning and managing their own careers, enabling all providers and

implementers of career guidance and counselling services to systematically implement their activities and to achieve the goals of career guidance and counselling (Ibid: 7).

Career guidance and counselling in higher education institutions: current situation

In recent years, more and more works have been formulated/published that are theoretically and empirically concerned with the problem of career guidance and counselling at the level of higher education. The authors mainly focused on: researching the needs of students for career guidance (Kaufman et al., 2003; Kaufman, 2006; Fouad et al., 2006, according to Crisana et al, 2014), how to engage in this process (Lee & Johnston, 2001), an analysis of the existing conditions in career guidance (Watts, 2007; Roberts, 2013;), as well as the concept of a career adviser (Sun & Yuen, 2012). An analysis of available literature suggests that career guidance and counselling at the higher education level is usually organized within a certain Career Center, or departments for career guidance and counselling at faculties, within which are held various courses, lectures, on-line programs, employment fairs, experiential-style guidance (which implies simulated job interviews and experience through practice), campuses and/or individual counselling, at different times. Although there is no single, comprehensive solution to the organization of career guidance and counselling in higher education institutions, the authors agree that it is very important for the well being of both the individual and society as a whole.

In our country, within the Tempus CareerS project – the development of career guidance in order to improve higher education in the Republic of Serbia (Janković Balović et al., 2014), which aimed at the comprehensive development of career guidance and counselling in the field of higher education in Serbia and implementation of *Career Guidance and Counselling Strategy in the Republic of Serbia* (2010) a number of activities were organized involving representatives of the Career Development Center of the University of Belgrade, representatives of the University of Novi Sad, Niš and Kragujevac, Singidunum University, the Youth Office, Ministry of Youth and sports, Belgrade Open Schools, as well as partners of the University of Silesia and Padua and Svonsi University.

The document *Program and methodology of career guidance and student counselling* was formulated/devised, which foresees the framework of standards for program development, methodology of work, and certain contents of the program of work of student career centres. The document proposes that career guidance and counselling services are provided through specific

modules (modular access) and extracurricular (central model). A modular approach can be realized at universities through: 1) a *general module*, available to students in any class, study program or course requiring limited development time; 2) a *custom module*, in accordance with the needs of a particular department, study program or course leading to more active involvement of the academic community in career guidance and counselling activities; 3) a *specific module* developed for specific purposes within a particular department or course that represents a strategy which is developed for the specific needs of a particular academic community. The central model implies the provision of career guidance and counselling services outside the curriculum, and the relocation of career guidance and counselling services to careers centres, specialized institutions for providing such services.

In accordance with the Framework of Standards defined through the mentioned *CareerS project – the development of career guidance in order to improve higher education in the Republic of Serbia*, the contents can include: 1) career information (information on the profession, the situation and trends in the labour market, employment perspectives, opportunities for gaining work experience and professional development, etc.); 2) career counselling (focused on the individual plan and specific contents that students recognize as important e.g. assistance in compiling a work biography, applying for a scholarship, etc.); 3) career education (educational contents that enable them to make choices in the field of education and professional work, to plan and manage their careers, etc.); and 4) connect with educational institutions (providing opportunities for acquiring practical experience, reflection).

Initial [undergraduate] education of students – future educators: competencies in development and career management

Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills and values that enable the individual to act actively and efficiently in a particular situation (Pantić & Wubbels, 2010) and represent the integration of *declarative knowledge* (knowledge of), *procedural knowledge* (knowledge of how) and *conditional knowledge* (knowledge when) (Rajović & Radulović, 2007). Being competent is more than a sum of individual competencies as a set of separate skills and knowledge of what an individual must possess to successfully perform certain tasks. A competent preschool teacher is professional in his / her work, which implies autonomous and responsible action in accordance with the ethical nature of the practice of the preschool teacher and the complex, dynamic and contextually conditioned practice of upbringing (*Standards of competence for the profession of preschool teachers and their professional development*, 2018).

Within the framework of the competence of preschool teachers for the development and management of careers, the competencies would represent knowledge, skills, and values that enable preschool teachers to collect, analyse and organize information about themselves, the world of work, as well as knowledge, skills and the value of attitudes that are necessary for making and implementing decisions and career advancement.

So far, the current practices of initial [undergraduate] education of preschool teachers have not identified activities that would strategically support the development of career skills of students – future preschool teachers, although the results of research carried out on the student population at the College of Professional Studies for Preschool Teachers in Sremska Mitrovica (Marković & Dedaj, 2018) that students recognize the need to develop the skills of career management and of linking initial [college/undergraduate] education with the labour market. In order to gain a clearer insight into the needs of students in this field, we conducted a survey with the aim of determining student's opinion on ways to improve career competencies during initial education. In accordance with the aim of the research, two tasks were defined: 1) determine which skills are in the area of career management that students want to develop in the framework of initial education; 2) determine through which types of activities it is possible to provide support to students in the field of developing their career skills. The starting point is that students want to further develop communication skills in a foreign language and the skills to conduct interviews with an employer, primarily through instructions/trainings that will be achieved within the project. It is expected that there will be differences in the assessment of the desired competencies in relation to previous work experience of students.

Method

Sample and variables of research

A survey of students of the final year of elementary studies (N = 45) and specialist and master studies (N = 55) was conducted. In basic studies, 33 students (73.3%) had no work experience, and 12 students (26.7%) did have work experience and worked in day nursery groups because they had previously completed secondary medical school. Within the specialist and master studies, 17 students (30.9%) had no work experience, while 38 students (69.1%) had experience working in educational groups in pre-school institutions. Previous work experience in the pre-school institution was an independent variable, which was divided into two categories at the level of the overall cause: no work experience (N = 50), with working experience in day nursery and preschool groups in preschool institution (N = 50).

In the first stage of the research, during classes at basic [undergraduate], or specialist and master studies level, students filled out a purpose-built questionnaire. In the second stage, the analysis of human and material-technical resources in the school was carried out. In the analysis of human resources, emphasis was placed on the specific competencies of teachers in the area, while the analysis of material and technical conditions focused on the spatial and technical capacity support that would be needed for the development of students' competences in the field of career development and management.

Used instruments

For the purpose of the research, a combined type questionnaire was constructed, in which general data on the respondents was collected in the introductory part: the year of studies and work experience. The second part was designed in the form of a five-stage Likert scale of assessment with the offered categories of 1 – “I completely disagree” to 5 – “I completely agree”, where the respondents evaluated their level of agreement with 13 skills in the field of career development and management, such as: “I need to further develop communication skills in a foreign language”. The third part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to evaluate the ways in which, during their initial [undergraduate] education, they could develop the skills of developing and managing careers. Each of the seven offered ways of developing career skills (within regular subjects, additional courses, projects, etc.) were evaluated by respondents in the YES or NO category. If an affirmative answer was given for some of the offered options, respondents were asked to describe their proposal in more detail through an open-type question. Additionally, respondents could, besides the offered options, also describe (suggest) some other way that was not envisaged by the list of claims.

For the needs of analysis of specific teachers' competences, a form was created in which teachers provided data on: certified training courses, trainings, participation in projects, experience in the conduct of training, and training.

Procedure

In the first stage of the research, specialist and master students completed a questionnaire during the course of classes. The data collected by the questionnaire was analysed with a quantitative and qualitative approach. The procedure lasted 15 minutes, which speaks in favour of the economics of this part of the research. In the second stage, the analysis of human and material-technical resources in the school was carried out. In the analysis of human resources, emphasis was placed on the specific competencies of teachers in the given area,

and the analysis of the Teacher's Book containing academic data on academic careers as well as additional knowledge and skills developed by teachers as part of their professional training through various education, then on participation in projects, etc. Since by filling out the course books teachers assessed personally what data was relevant in their professional development, and as the course books had a relatively limited space, there was the possibility that some important data was not contained in this document, so teachers were asked to provide information about their additional competencies in a form that was specifically created. The analysis of material and technical conditions focused on the spatial and technical capacities that would be required for the development of students' competencies in the field of career development and management. The procedure consisted of insight into the documentation of the institution's accreditation from the last period, where precise data on spatial capacities and technical support existed.

Data analysis

The data collected by the questionnaire was analysed using a quantitative and qualitative approach. Answers to closed-type questions were analysed by methods of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), a t-test of significance of differences between arithmetic meanings and the hi-square test method in the SPSS 19.0 package. Answers to open-ended questions were listed and categorized, and then quantified. Qualitative Approach: content analysis The Teacher's Book, and forms where teachers recorded additional skills that are relevant to the career development of students, was also used in human analysis. By compiling data from relevant documents from the institution's accreditation, the situation in the field of material and technical resources was determined.

The results

On the basis of the collected data, analysis of average scores was performed on the scale of the assessment of the desired competences, in relation to the work experience of the respondents. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Desired competencies of students for career development and management

Career skills	Work experience	N	AS	SD	t	Df	p
Teamwork	Without work experience	50	3,62	1,244	0,461	98	0,349
	With work experience	50	3,50	1,359			
	Total	100	3,56	1,297			
Using ICT	Without work experience	50	3,50	0,953	-1,528	98	0,799
	With work experience	50	3,80	1,010			
	Total	100	3,65	0,989			
Writing projects	Without work experience	50	3,20	1,429	-2,769	98	0,013
	With work experience	50	3,92	1,158			
	Total	100	3,56	1,343			
Creating a business plan	Without work experience	50	3,54	1,328	0,079	98	0,206
	With work experience	50	3,52	1,199			
	Total	100	3,53	1,259			
Communication in a foreign language	Without work experience	50	3,58	1,430	-1,315	98	0,003
	With work experience	50	3,92	1,140			
	Total	100	3,75	1,298			
Researching your own knowledge, skills, personality traits	Without work experience	50	3,64	1,083	-1,468	98	0,043
	With work experience	50	3,94	0,956			
	Total	100	3,79	1,028			
Creating a Career Plan	Without work experience	50	3,52	1,015	-0,384	98	0,810
	With work experience	50	3,60	1,069			
	Total	100	3,56	1,038			
Developing additional skills through online learning	Without work experience	50	3,40	0,990	-2,802	98	0,452
	With work experience	50	3,98	1,078			
	Total	100	3,69	1,070			
Talking / interviewing with the employer	Without work experience	50	3,96	0,856	1,248	98	0,057
	With work experience	50	3,70	1,199			
	Total	100	3,83	1,045			
Business communication with the employer	Without work experience	50	3,62	1,193	0,256	98	0,584
	With work experience	50	3,56	1,146			
	Total	100	3,59	1,164			
Writing a CV	Without work experience	50	3,32	1,463	-0,213	98	0,282
	With work experience	50	3,38	1,354			
	Total	100	3,35	1,403			
Writing a motivation letter	Without work experience	50	3,12	1,189	-1,919	98	0,277
	With work experience	50	3,60	1,309			
	Total	100	3,36	1,267			
Making career decisions	Without work experience	50	3,48	1,092	-0,401	98	0,027
	With work experience	50	3,58	1,386			
	Total	100	3,53	1,243			

Students estimate that they had the greatest need to develop the ability to conduct interviews with an employer (AS = 3.83), the ability to research their own knowledge, skills, personality traits (AS = 3.79) and ability to communicate in a foreign language (AS = 3.75). The lowest average scores were obtained in assessing the importance of improving the skills for writing a CV (AS = 3.35) and a motivation letter (AS = 3.36). Students without work experience assessed a significant improvement in teamwork skills and the skills to conduct a conversation/interviews with employers in relation to students with work experience. Differences in estimates on the importance of improving the skills of conducting interviews with the employer are close to the level of statistical significance ($t = 1,248$ df (98); $p = 0,057$). Students who had work experience assessed the improvement of all other skills more relevant to students without work experience. Statistically significant differences were found on assertions relating to skills: project writing ($t = -2,769$; df (98), $p = 0,013$), foreign language communications ($t = -1,315$; df (98); $p = 0,003$) (-1.468; df (98), $p = 0.043$) and making career decisions ($t = -0.401$; df (98); $p = 0.027$).

In the following, displayed results underline which were the preferred ways of improving career skills, in the opinion of the students surveyed (Table 2).

Table 2: Student opinions on possible ways of developing career skills

The ways of developing career skills	Work experience	N _o of affirmative answers (f)	Percentage of respondents who gave a confirmed answer (%)	χ^2	Df	P
Expanding the contents of regular items	Without work experience	19	38	1,461	1	0,157
	With work experience	25	50			
	Total	44	44			
Introduction of new subjects in curriculum I and II level of studies	Without work experience	11	22,9	1,012	1	0,218
	With work experience	16	32,0			
	Total	27	27,6			
Organization of foreign language courses and ICT skills at school	Without work experience	21	42	2,560	1	0,081
	With work experience	29	58			
	Total	50	50			
Organizing educational and psychological workshops	Without work experience	24	48	1,004	1	0,212
	With work experience	29	58			
	Total	53	53			
Developing a wider project that would include education, workshops, short courses, contacts with employers, etc.	Without work experience	45	90	3,473	1	0,048
	With work experience	38	76			
	Total	83	83			
Through online activities	Without work experience	42	84	0,071	1	0,500
	With work experience	41	82			
	Total	83	83			
Through the formation and operation of the Career Development Center	Without work experience	30	60	1,099	1	0,201
	With work experience	35	70			
	Total	65	65			
In some other way	Without work experience	0	0	2,041	1	0,247
	With work experience	2	4			
	Total	2	2			

The results indicate that most affirmative responses are identified in relation to the proposal that career skills can be enhanced through a wider project that would include education, workshops, short courses, and contacts with employers. As many as 90% of students with no work experience and 76% of students with work experience supported this way of improving their career skills. The difference in the number of students without work experience and with work experience suggesting the realization of the project is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.473$; $df(1)$; $p = 0.048$). Online activities were proposed by 84% of students with no work experience and 82% of students with work experience. A significant number of respondents advocated the establishment of a Career Development Center: 60% of those without work experience and 70% of those with work experience. The organization of educational and psychological workshops was supported by 48% of the respondents without work experience and 58% with work experience, and the organization of foreign language courses and ICT skills by 42% of respondents without work experience and 58% with work experience. 44% of respondents expressed an opinion about expanding the content of regular subjects in order to improve their career skills: 38% without work experience and 50% with work experience. The smallest number of respondents, 22.9% without work experience and 32% with work experience, was for the introduction of new subjects in the curriculum of I and / or II level studies. Two students (4%) who had work experience suggested that courses for the development of career skills should be organized at the school.

A number of students gave suggestions on how the contents of regular subjects could be improved, which subjects could be included in the curriculum I and/or II level of studies, what ICT courses and foreign language courses they would like, and which contents of educational and psychological workshops. It was proposed to expand the content within the framework of regular movements: Entrepreneurship (14.28% of responses) – production of business plan, business development; Change Management (10.34% of responses) – how to manage change, how to overcome resistance to change; Management systems in education (10.34% of responses) – examples of project designs; Team work (10.34% of reactions) – team work; English language (6.89% of answers) – use of language in business communication; Marketing (4.76% of answers). Students suggested the introduction of the following subjects: Business communications (18.64% of answers), Development of career management skills (12.5% of answers), Other foreign languages (6.89% of responses), Project writing (3.44% of responses), and Management of preschool institutions (3.44% of answers). As part of organizing courses, students propose: Business English (74.31% of answers), ICT skills (22.52% of answers) and Foreign language course – German (19.78%). They proposed educational and psychological workshops in the field: Collaboration and team work (18.75% of answers), Assertiveness and communication (12.5% of responses), Business relations

(12.5% of responses), Psychology and sociology of behaviour in the work environment (9.09% of the response).

In planning the realization of these activities, human and material-technical resources in the school were analysed. Based on insight into the Teacher's Book, specific competencies of employees were identified that would be a significant resource to support the career development of students. It was found that 12 teachers from the pedagogical-psychological area, the areas of language, economics and informatics had the following specific competencies:

- Certificate for the ToT trainer and assertive skills;
- REBT certificate and systemic family psychotherapist;
- experience in conducting training in the realization of accredited programs of professional development: Professional orientation (mentoring in the application of professional orientation programs and professional orientation and empowerment of young people for self-awareness), Career guidance and counselling, Team work;
- experience in realization of IT skills courses;
- experience in preparing students, educators and employees for Cambridge exams in English;
- education in the field of: modern business decision making skills, project planning, project management, communication skills;
- experience in the realization of workshops in the field of interpersonal skills as part of a research and development project.

The material and technical resources identified as supporting the activities of improving the career skills of students include: spatial capacities (amphitheatres, classrooms, cabinets, library and reading room) and the latest equipment (all-in-one and laptops, projectors, LCD TVs, digital cameras with stand). Equipment for distance learning in school was especially distinguished.

Discussion

The conducted research pointed out skills in the field of career management that students would like to further develop in the framework of initial [undergraduate] education. These are, first and foremost, the skills to conduct an interview with the employer, then research skills and self-assessment skills, knowledge and personality traits, and communication skills in a foreign language, which is in line with the hypothesis set. A tendency was identified for students who had work experience to a higher degree need to advance certain competencies in the field of career development and management in relation to students without work experience, indicating that they were probably more aware of the need for additional career advancement, and had adopted

the concept of professional development through lifelong learning. Students without work experience expressed to a significant degree the need to improve the skills of conducting interviews with an employer, in accordance with the important role these play in the process of employment. These students recognize the importance of further developing the skills of functioning and work in a team. The obtained results confirm the assumption that there are differences in the assessment of desired competencies in relation to the previous work experience of the students. When it comes to forms (types) of activities through which it is possible to provide support to students in the field of career development, a smaller number of students proposed curriculum teaching, and significantly more suggested other activities – primarily a project that would include education, workshops, short courses, contacts with the employer, etc., which is also in accordance with the set hypothesis. A significant number of students pleaded for online activities, language courses and ICT skills, as well as for the formation and operation of a Career Development Center.

Taking into account the results of the research, as well as the fact that a significant number of teachers had specific competencies in the field of career management and development, and that there were adequate material and technical resources in the school that could be supportive of these activities, it can be concluded that the College of Professional Studies for Preschool Teachers in Sremska Mitrovica should initiate a research and development project aimed at defining the concept of supporting students in the final years of studies at the school for educating preschool teachers in the development of career management skills. In the initial phase of the project, it was necessary, with a questionnaire, to examine self-assessment of the skills of career management of students in the final years of basic studies, specialist and master studies. The next step should identify students who estimate that they need support in developing the skills of career management and with whom project activities could be accomplished. In accordance with research findings, in the main phase of the project, training focused on content related to the importance of improving the skills of career management, competencies in the context of employability and transition into the world of work, teamwork, assertiveness, successful business communication, self-awareness and self-confidence, creating a business plan, and creating projects. One segment of project activities would also be based on a short course of business English and ICT skills. After the completion of the project activities, a final examination of self-assessment of career skills of all students should be carried out with the aim of determining the effects of the achieved activities by identifying differences in the self-assessment of the career skills of student-participants of the project and other students of the final year of basic, specialist and master studies. The sustainability of the project would include teacher training that would, at the next stage, include online career management skills and establish a Career Management and Career Center.

Conclusion

The conducted research indicated that the students of specialist and master studies need to improve their skills in career development and management. Up until now, at the Higher School for Education of Educators, there have been no systematically implemented activities through which students could prepare for inclusion in the world of work. Based on the recording of students' needs in the field of development and improvement of career competencies, several important areas have been identified in which additional education, training and courses are required. A greater number of teachers have specific competencies for the realization of these activities, and there are adequate technical capacities for their realization, directly and online.

In addition to extending the content of regular subjects to respond to a cross-curricular model, the introduction of a change in the practice of initial [undergraduate] education of educators in the field of development of career competencies could be realized through a research and development project in the form of action research. The realization and evaluation of project activities would be the basis for the conception of the Career Development Center program within the initial [undergraduate] education of educators, in accordance with the central model.

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